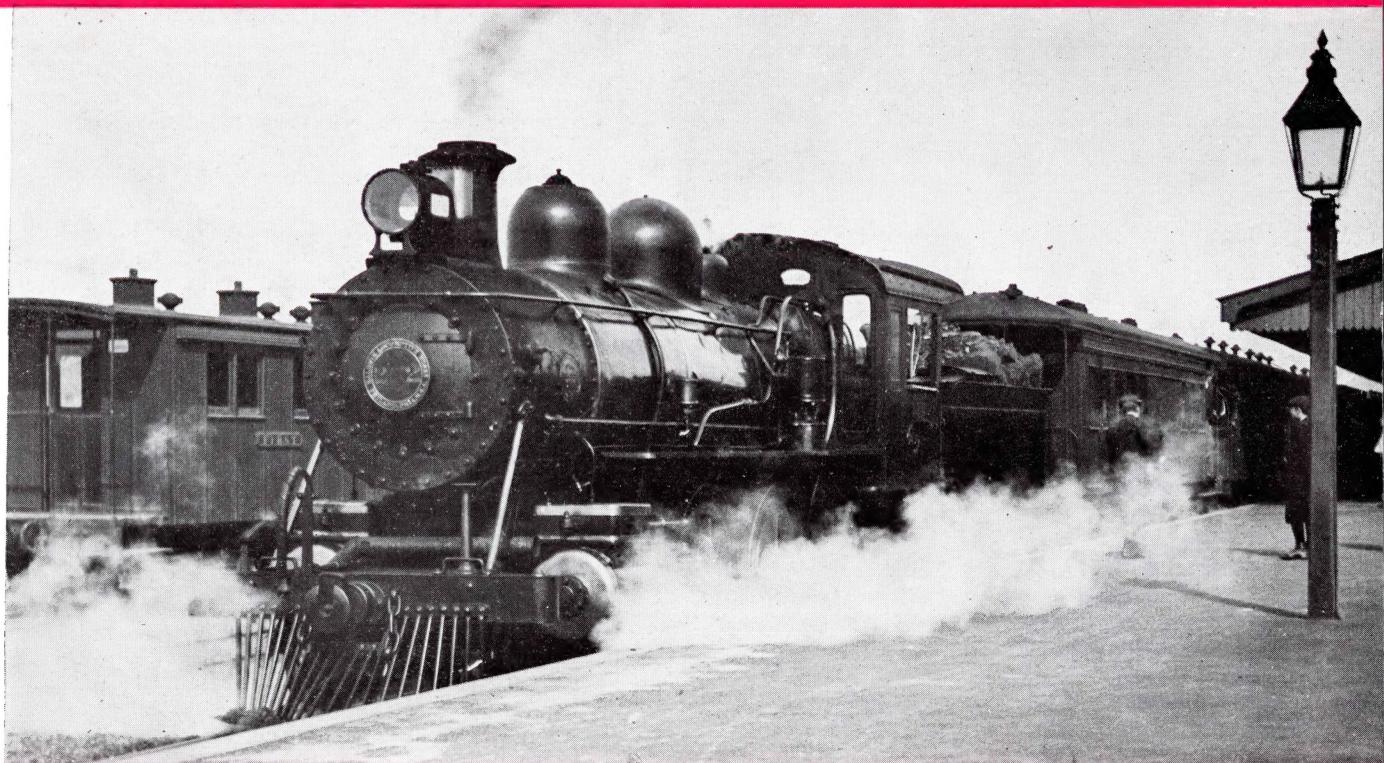


RAILS OVER THE PLAINS

1876 - 1959



A CENTENNIAL YEAR SURVEY OF THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE
PROGRESS OF SOUTH CANTERBURY

EIGHTY YEARS OF RAILWAYS IN SOUTH CANTERBURY

Canterbury was the birthplace of the New Zealand Railways. It was near Christchurch, back in 1863, that the whistle of a steam locomotive was first heard in this country.

Within four years of their arrival in Canterbury, the sturdy pioneers realised the need for railway communications to develop their newly found province. They prepared plans accordingly—plans that were magnificent in their conception. For example, a tunnel 1½ miles long was to be driven through the Port Hills separating Christchurch and Lyttelton, and the railways were to be laid to the broad gauge of 5ft 3in.

The driving of the tunnel, begun in 1860, was completed in 1867, and gradually the broad-gauge tracks inched northward and southward from Christchurch. The Canterbury Provincial Council intended to continue the Great South Railway to the Otago boundary, but progress was slow owing to the difficulty in arranging finance, particularly after the Government in Wellington had forbidden the provinces to borrow money for public works.

In 1870 Parliament sanctioned the grandiose public works policy drafted by the Colonial Treasurer, Sir Julius Vogel. This scheme provided for the construction of a national network of railways, financed with borrowed capital and built by immigrants. To reduce the cost of construction the gauge was to be standardised at 3ft 6in.

The broad gauge in Canterbury extended southward to Rakaia, 35 miles from Christchurch. This point, reached in 1873, was the high water mark of broad-gauge construction. Under the Vogel scheme the

line was pushed over the plains to Ashburton, but the rails were only 3ft 6in. apart. By August 1874 narrow-gauge trains were running between Christchurch and Ashburton, and railway construction was in hand throughout South Canterbury and Otago.

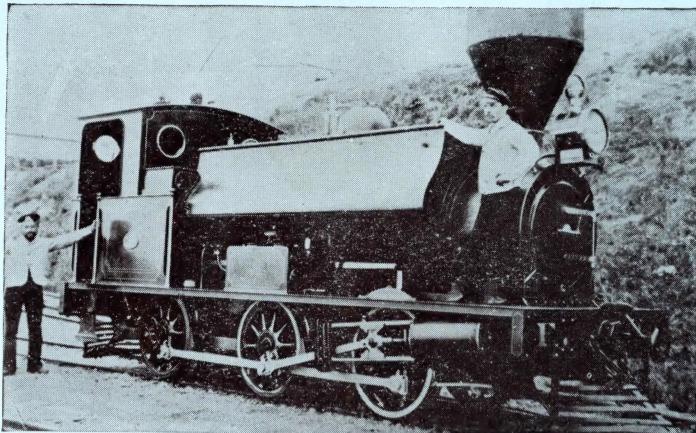
To speed up construction, the railway builders began operations at Timaru, working northward to meet the railhead from Ashburton. The first section, from Timaru to Temuka, was completed in October 1875, and at the beginning of February 1876 the railheads met between Temuka and Ealing.

The completion of the Christchurch-Timaru railway was celebrated by a banquet at Timaru on 4 February 1876. Visitors from Christchurch attending the banquet included "lords, a knight, members of the Provincial Executive, of the General Assembly, a mayor and alderman, and the town clerk, the British public, and brethren of the quill". These worthy gentlemen travelled down from Christchurch on the first through train, which took seven hours to complete the 100-mile journey. The arrival of the train at Timaru was marked by a salute from "several pieces of cannon", and the visitors were welcomed by the mayor and council of Timaru.

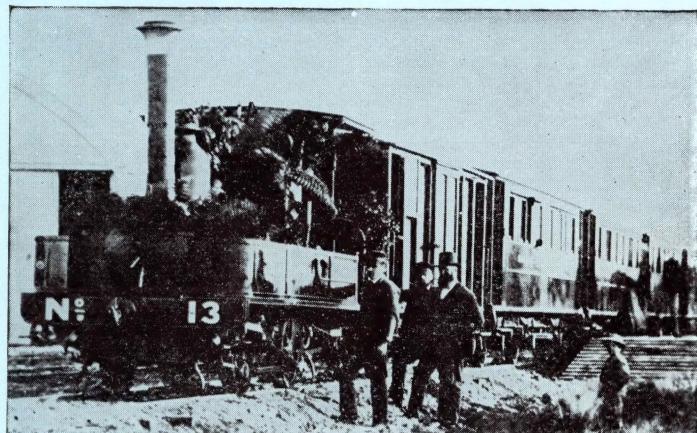
There was, to use the words of a contemporary reporter, "a general shaking of hands as if everybody is delighted to see everybody else, and the railway communication between Christchurch and Timaru is an accomplished fact". At the banquet which followed, in the Oddfellows' Hall, these cordial relations became strained as credit for the completion of the railway was claimed in turn by speakers representing the Government, the Province, and the Town. In the end there was such an uproar that the police had to be summoned, and the banquet came to an end.

Seen in retrospect, this fiasco was but a comic interlude. Railway construction continued apace through South Canterbury, and within a year trains were running over the Waitaki and into Oamaru. By September 1878 the line had been completed to Dunedin, and a few months later it became possible to travel by train from Timaru to Invercargill.

In addition to the main line serving the seaboard of South Canterbury, branch lines were built to serve the inland regions. The short line into Waimate was completed in 1877, and another, 35 miles long, was built in stages to tap the Fairlie district. This branch line was completed in 1884, and the pattern of South Canterbury's railway communications was fully woven.

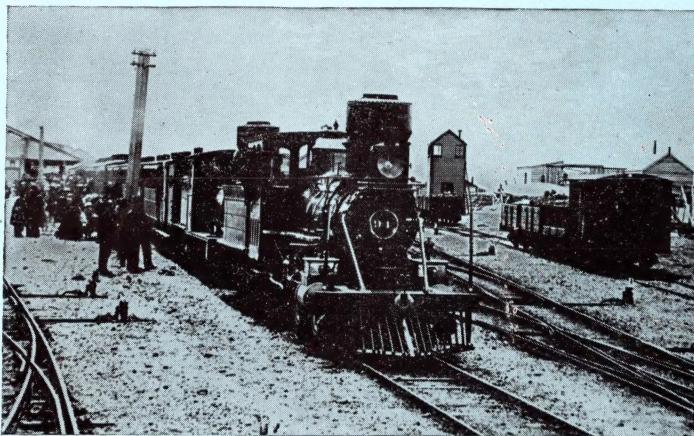


Green-painted locomotives, like this immaculate "F" class engine, were the height of fashion when the iron road reached Timaru.

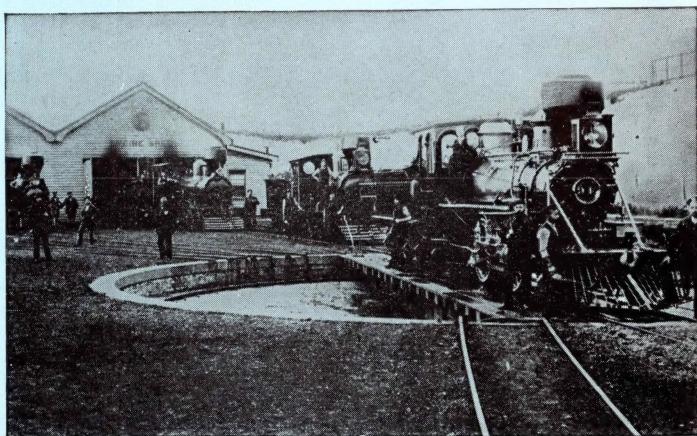


Waimate's first train, in 1877, was hauled by this long-funnelled little "A" class engine bearing the fateful number thirteen.

FLASHBACK TO YESTERYEAR



Train time at Timaru in 1885. Hauled by ornate American "K" class locomotives, the thirty-miles-an-hour expresses of the day consisted of tiny coaches with hard seats, oil lamps, and no heating or air brakes.



Timaru railwaymen of the early eighties pose proudly beside their gleaming iron steeds. Favourite Canterbury locomotive in those days was the famous "Yankee-K" (seen on the turntable), about which many legends were woven.



A heavily laden North Express swings around the curve at Caroline Bay in the pleasant days before the Kaiser's War.

With its comfortable cars and hostess service, the modern, fast "South Island Limited" is a far cry from early express trains.

TRAVEL TODAY

Eighty-three years ago, when trains began running regularly between Christchurch and Timaru, the 100-mile journey took no less than 4½ hours. And the southward journey from Timaru to Dunedin, taking nearly 6½ hours, was gruelling enough to daunt the most adventurous heart.

Today the fast "South Island Limited" express trains skim over the plains at 50 m.p.h. for mile upon mile, covering the 100 miles between Christchurch and Timaru in a little over 2½ hours. These trains consist of handsome, roomy steel coaches that have foam-rubber seats, large windows, electric light and steam heating. Complete with hostess service, they offer today's traveller comfort and convenience undreamed of 80 years ago.

Even faster are the sleek red-and-silver diesel railcars which run through South Canterbury nightly in each direction. Timaru and Christchurch are now only 2½ hours apart, and the longer, more difficult section between Timaru and Dunedin can be covered in 3½ hours. Passengers love the restful reclining seats in the railcars; they enjoy the exhilaration of fast travel, and appreciate the convenience of the schedules.



PLANS FOR PROGRESS

Although the New Zealand Railways will soon complete their first 100 years of service to the nation, they do not intend to rest on their laurels. Millions of pounds are being spent each year on improved facilities and new equipment to serve the people of New Zealand, and South Canterbury is sharing in this progress.

The basis of rail transport is the track itself. To carry today's heavier and faster traffic, New Zealand railway tracks are being improved by welding rails together to eliminate joints. Heavier rails, better rail fastenings, deep crushed-stone ballast, and mechanized equipment to speed inspection and maintenance—these are some of the modern developments that are helping to keep the steel road abreast of traffic requirements.

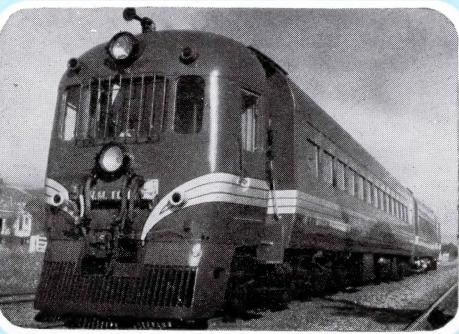
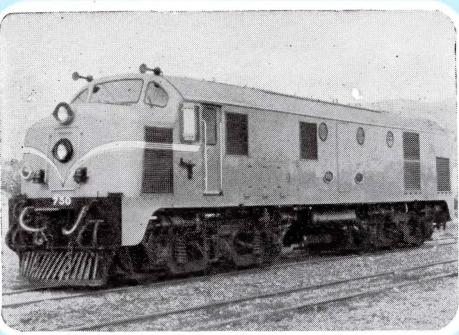
Attractive new stations are being built, goods yards and sheds modernized, and new bridges constructed to replace old structures no longer suitable for today's loads and speeds.

Sleek diesel railcars now supplement the main trunk express trains in the South Island, and provide faster, more frequent services on other routes. New goods wagons of modern design are replacing older vehicles at the rate of hundreds every year, in order to keep pace with the rising output of farm and factory. More than 3,000 new wagons will be needed within the next few years.

The magnificent "Ja" class steam locomotives are the last word in steam power, but no more are to be built. The versatile and efficient diesel locomotive is the motive power of the future, and the diesel fleet already operating in the South Island has produced substantial economies and enabled train services to be improved.

Safe and rapid movement of trains on busy lines is ensured by up-to-the-minute electric signalling and interlocking, including remote operation by means of C.T.C.—centralised traffic control. Communications are being modernised with the latest types of telephone exchanges and teleprinter equipment, while accounting procedures have been revolutionised by electronic machines.

With this never-ceasing technological progress, the New Zealand Railways will continue to provide the dependable, economical transport and travel services that are so essential to the well-being of the community.



ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, when the history of organised settlement began in South Canterbury, transport was both primitive and expensive. When man ventured overland he travelled afoot or on horseback. For coastwise travel, or for transport of heavy freight from the principal ports, he was dependent on small sailing vessels. The arrival of the railway in the seventies brought far-reaching changes in the social and economic life of the southern districts of Canterbury Province. Since then rail transport has contributed handsomely to the development of South Canterbury, and progress and prosperity have followed the whistle of the train. Today the railways are the mainstay of Canterbury's commerce, its agriculture, and its industry. They provide the essential heavy transport facilities without which no community can prosper, and they will continue to do so for as far into the future as can be foreseen.

